

## August 1, 2007 - Slaughter Lauds Expansion of SCHIP

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Wednesday, August 1, 2007

### Slaughter Lauds Expansion of SCHIP Legislation to Cover 5 Million more Children Nation-Wide

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-Fairport), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today spoke on the House floor in support of the Children's Health and Medicare Protection Act of 2007 (CHAMP Act), expected to pass the House later today.

"What motivated me and so many of my colleagues to come to Washington in the first place was the thought that, on any day, a vote could be held that would improve the lives of millions of people throughout our country," Rep. Slaughter said. "And that is exactly the chance that we have been given today."

"Addressing the state of the health care in our country is one of the most important issues to the American people for a simple reason: our health care system is failing far too many Americans."

"Those who argue against passing this bill are arguing in favor of the status quo. But for Democrats, the status quo isn't good enough."

The complete text of Rep. Slaughter's remarks, as prepared, are included below.

In New York State, 400,000 children are enrolled in SCHIP, the second highest state enrollment in the nation. 400,000 more, however, do not have health coverage. Because of SCHIP, the number of uninsured children in New York dropped 40% between 1997 and 2005.

The CHAMP Act also will help Western New York retain doctors and medical specialists by preventing a proposed 10

percent cut in Medicare reimbursements to physicians, instead replacing it with an increase for two years.

#### BACKGROUND: The CHAMP Act

- Provides health care to a total of 11 million children - five million new children who currently lack healthcare coverage, and six million who are currently covered by SCHIP - by reauthorizing and improving SCHIP.

- Reverses efforts to privatize Medicare by equalizing payments between traditional Medicare and overpaid private plans.

- Strengthens Medicare to: ensure beneficiaries' access to their doctors; expands preventive benefits, mental health services and physical, occupational and speech therapies; reduces costs for seniors and people with disabilities with low incomes; protect consumers; and extends policies that protect access to health care in rural communities;

- Raises the price per pack of cigarettes by \$.45, which is expected to save tens of thousands of lives and billions in future health care costs by preventing more than a million children from taking up smoking and reducing adult smoking.

#### FURTHER BACKGROUND: The State Children's Health Insurance Program

- Congress created SCHIP in 1997 with broad bipartisan support. This year, six million children have health care because of SCHIP.

- Funding for SCHIP expires September 30. If Congress does not act, these six million children will no longer have access to health care coverage.

- Children enrolled in the SCHIP program come from working families with parents who either cannot afford insurance or hold jobs that lack health care benefits.

- Although the President highlighted his support for SCHIP while running for re-election in 2004, the Bush Administration and Congressional Republicans proposed to under-fund the program significantly. Millions of children would have lost coverage as a result.

Rep. Slaughter's remarks, as prepared, are included below:

I am enormously proud of the accomplishments that we can credit to this Democratic-led Congress.

From education to healthcare, from national security to increasing the minimum wage, great strides have been taken to make our country stronger, healthier, and better prepared for the future.

But it is with special pride that I rise today. I feel that what motivated me and so many of my colleagues to come to Washington in the first place was the thought that, on any day, a vote could be held that would improve the lives of millions of people throughout our country.

And that is exactly the chance that we have been given today - the chance to vote for a bill that will improve medical care in this country, improve the health of our citizens, and offer new hope and help for literally millions of children who would otherwise be left without either.

M. Speaker, I think that everyone listening today recognizes the reality of the situation we face. Addressing the state of the healthcare in our country is one of the most important issues to the American people for a simple reason: our healthcare system is failing far too many Americans.

Tens of millions of our citizens have no insurance. Tens of millions more are underinsured. For them, all of the medical wonders our doctors have produced may as well not exist.

When they fall ill - or worse, when their children are hurt, or have a fever, or need care - where can they turn? Far, far too often, the answer is: nowhere.

We need a comprehensive solution to this problem. The citizens of this country expect, and deserve, nothing less.

That is a challenge we must confront together, and it will take time. But today, here and now, we have the chance to make a real dent in one of the most galling and shameful inadequacies of our healthcare system: the lack of coverage for America's children.

Congress created SCHIP in 1997 with broad bipartisan support. As a result, six million children currently have health care coverage that otherwise would not. In my home state of New York, nearly 400,000 children are enrolled, the second highest number in the nation.

There is a reason why President Bush pledged that he would fully fund SCHIP while he was on the campaign trail in 2004: it was because this program is enormously popular with the public, and because it has already proven to be enormously successful.

And yet, there is much more to be done. Nine million American children still remain without health insurance. 400,000 of them are in New York State alone. It is a situation that remains, quite simply, unconscionable.

This bill allows us to take an enormous step forward. It will cover five million new children - 11 million in total. That would be a truly historic change.

Such a vast improvement is reason enough to support this legislation. But this bill does even more to better the health of Americans.

It will strengthen Medicare by expanding preventive benefits, as well as mental health services, reducing costs for seniors and people with disabilities who also have low incomes, and extending policies that protect access to health care in rural communities.

What is more, the bill will prevent a proposed 10 percent cut in Medicare reimbursements to physicians, replacing it with an increase for two years.

This is especially important for districts throughout the country - districts like mine, where we are having trouble holding on to good doctors because of financial concerns that, until now, have not been addressed.

Finally, this bill will raise the price per pack of cigarettes by 45 cents, a significant preventative healthcare initiative in its own right. This act alone is projected to save tens of thousands of lives and billions in future health care costs by preventing more than a million children from taking up smoking.

M. Speaker, in spite of these undeniable benefits, and in spite of the overwhelming popularity and accomplishments of this program, SCHIP is under attack.

Sadly, the President proposed to greatly under-fund SCHIP, a decision that would have severely limited its effectiveness. Republicans on the other side of the aisle agreed with this approach.

But not content to merely limit the reach of SCHIP, we will today witness an attempt on the Republican side to sink this bill entirely. In the face of all of the positive results that have come from this program, and all that it is set to achieve, the harshest rhetoric will be cast against it.

M. Speaker, we all know that my Republican colleagues can't really believe what they will be arguing. Instead, their objective is a different one: to deny Democrats the chance to talk about yet another legislative accomplishment over the August recess.

They are willing to do it at the expense of the health of our nation's children, M. Speaker. But we will not allow it.

Those who argue against passing this bill are arguing in favor of the status-quo. It's the same situation we faced more than 10 years ago, when bold attempts to fundamentally reform our nation's healthcare system were subject to withering attacks.

What was the result? Those reforms were blocked, and the national situation grew worse and worse with every passing year of Republican control.

Such a state of affairs may suit some in this body, M. Speaker, but for Democrats, the status quo isn't good enough.

The health of our nation's children isn't worth scoring a few political points in our eyes. We came here to produce change. That is what this bill does, and that is why we are so determined to pass it.

M. Speaker, to my Republican colleagues on the other side of the aisle, I say simply this: the healthcare crisis facing our nation isn't going to go away unless we take action.

I urge you to join with Democrats in passing this bill. This Congress must no longer idly accept a situation in which our fellow citizens - and our children - are left to fend for themselves.

It's time to put principles before politics. Our constituents expect us to tackle the healthcare challenge before us. They demand it. This bill is an important step. It will touch the lives of literally millions of our people.

No one should stand in its way.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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